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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001703

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: EXPULSIONS UPDATE

REF: A) DJIBOUTI 1633 B) DJIBOUTI 1674

Classified By: CONS/PD C.BEAMER FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

1. (U) On July 26 Djiboutian Interior Minister Abdoulkader Wais announced that all undocumented foreigners must leave Djibouti by August 31, a deadline which was later extended to September 15. According to Djiboutian security officials 180 illegal aliens were seized in the Ambouli neighborhood of Djibouti city on September 16. The illegals were to be held overnight and repatriated on September 17. Sweeps continued on the 17th in the downtown market area of Djibouti. 80 individuals were reportedly arrested on the 17th. International media present in Djibouti report that the sweeps took place in relative calm. Media reports from unidentified Djiboutian government sources continue to portray the USG as the primary force behind the expulsion policy. END SUMMARY.

THE POLICY

2. (C) The July 26 announcement by the Djiboutian Government that all undocumented foreigners had 35 days to leave the country was followed by an intense public awareness campaign in the local state media. The tone of Interior Minister Wais's public statements led everyone to believe that security forces were prepared to enforce this policy. Government officials cite security concerns, high unemployment, and public sanitation as their primary motivations for this policy but President Ismail Omar Guelleh's re-election campaign in 2005 is also an important factor. Expulsion is seen as a way of providing jobs for the high numbers of unemployed in Djibouti that do not sense any trickle down from the recent economic boom brought on by the presence of coalition forces. The "cleaning up" emphasis put on the expulsion campaign is being used to help Guelleh overcome the derisive nickname of "President Poubelle" (President Trash Can) he acquired as a result of the disintegration of public works and sanitation during his administration. Djiboutian critics of the U.S. engagement in their country bolster their argument that the U.S. is behind the expulsion policy by pointing to the fact that both President Guelleh and Minister Wais are Ethiopian born and would not have the courage, power, nor will to enact this policy if the order did not come from the world super power.

3. (C) Small scale sweeps and repatriations in Djibouti city began as early as mid-August. In late August, Wais extended the deadline to September 15 after several large demonstrations. By early September the Djiboutian authorities reported that over 80,000 illegal aliens had left the country voluntarily. Quantifying the statistical reports of departing illegals is difficult however as estimates range from 30-120,000. Djiboutian League of Human Rights (LDDH) president, Jean-Paul Noel, reported two separate incidents in late August of repatriates dying in the open desert after having been deposited at the frontier by Djiboutian authorities without food or water. Ethiopian exile opposition groups claim the expulsion is being used to target legitimate asylees for persecution and possible execution in Ethiopia. Comment: While reports of such targeting are credible, we have no evidence it is taking place as part of the expulsion.

THE REFUGEE GAME

4. (C) On September 11 UNHCR authorities reported that roughly 15,000 people had descended upon a transit center built in the Ali Sabieh district to screen asylum seekers (see ref B). A week before Minister Wais's July announcement UNHCR committed to refurbishing a Mengistu-era transit center in the southern district of Ali Sabieh to process approximately 2,500 asylum seekers (largely Ethiopian Oromo) that had been registered with the Djibouti office for nearly 10 years. In addition, the Djiboutian National Office for Refugees and Displaced persons (ONARS) had been delivering (comment: selling) asylee status cards in recent years to the tune of some 10,000. Seeing an opportunity for aid (comment: and reportedly at the urging of Djiboutian authorities) thousands of individuals with and without various identity documents descended upon the ill prepared transit center in

early September. UNHCR Djibouti director W. Collins Asare reported that much of the problem stemmed from a rumor that individuals at this transit center were to be processed for relocation in Canada, the U.S., and Australia. On September 14, World Food Program logistics coordinator and security advisor Robert Gillenwater reported that the Government had cleared out the camp significantly and that WFP was providing a small emergency ration to individuals quitting the camp for foreign frontiers. A UNHCR protection officer who preferred not to be named stated that he felt many of the individuals who departed the transit center were Djiboutians with ONARS asylee status who returned to Djibouti city when they realized there was no hope of being relocated to a third country.

THE SWEEPS

15. (C) Speculation has abounded from the outset regarding the degree to which the Djiboutian authorities would pursue their expulsion policy. LDDH published a white paper on September 14 declaring that the entrance into private homes by security forces was unconstitutional and unacceptable. The decree went on to quote Minister Wais as saying that "our raids will be focused on suspected alien havens." A Djiboutian police officer reported that the instructions they received from their chief, Hassan Djama, were "you know where the non-Djiboutians live...go find them." Security forces reportedly arrested 180 individuals in the Ambouli neighborhood on September 16 in pacific fashion. BBC stringer Jonah Fisher reported that the sweeps had a staged effect as security forces videotaped themselves apprehending illegal aliens with extreme politeness.

THE ECONOMY

16. (C) The short term impact of this policy is already being felt by every woman in Djibouti who is cooking and cleaning, frequently for the first time in her life. The shortage of skilled and low wage laborers is hitting commercial and private sectors alike. Long term however, the policy could go a long way in regularizing the Djiboutian employment market and prohibiting Djiboutian employers from exploiting their labor. For this to be successful Djibouti will need to consider lowering its high public health and social security taxes on employers. Neither system works efficiently and both workers and employers complain of the significant drain it places on them while accomplishing nothing.

COMMENT

17. (C) The atmosphere in Djibouti city is tense for the undocumented and the people who employ them as speculation continues on where the next round of sweeps will take place. The expulsions appear to be occurring in relative calm, however the LDDH did report that one individual was shot and killed in Ambouli on the 16th while fleeing from police. With that exception in mind, the significant international media attention on the ground seems to have focused the Djiboutian leadership's attention on restraining their security forces during the operations.

18. (C) The ongoing effort by Djiboutian authorities to pass the responsibility for this Djiboutian policy to U.S. security interests is likely a result of internal domestic pressure. Many of Djibouti's most powerful businessmen are suffering large losses as their labor costs rise and they attempt to train entire staffs. Despite Post's public disassociation from the policy international media outlets (AFP, RFI, VOA, BBC) continue to feel the best story is the one leaked by Djiboutian authorities that the U.S. is behind the policy.

SMITH